

SECULARISM AND THE RELIGIOUS FAITH

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It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fall of the Soviet “Iron curtain” in the beginning of 1990s marked the onset of a religious revival in Post-Soviet countries. Within several years, however, religion has become mundane in society and lost its edge for a man of modernity. Once a superficial analysis of a mass religiosity is carried out, society can be diagnosed with a disease of *secularism*. Basing our judgments on the works of such scholars as A. Besançon, A. Camus, G. Kistlyov, V. Petrov (Domontovich), P. J. Tillich, M. Epstein, and S. Escobar, this paper will seek to study the peculiarities of this spiritual phenomenon in comparison with a religious faith, and display the dynamics of these worldview paradigms within the time frame of the 20th and 21st centuries.

First, one should define the term “religious faith” as a very old and typical phenomenon. The term “religion” stems from the Latin “religare” meaning to unite (man with God), or from “religio,” meaning something holy: an object of worship or a cult. In this context, however, the word “faith” is described as a dual term: as *confidence* in God and personal *faithfulness* in one’s ministry to God. Thus, religious faith is determined as a search for a religious *Absolute*, i.e. an object of service and dedication of one’s life; this faith is *worship*.

We are convinced that the key to understanding the character of modern religious quests is to see it through secularism. Our claim is that this term is open, and one should approach it descriptively. It is the concept of *mass thinking*, not a product of a single philosophic school of thought. The word “secularism” can be easily replaced with the synonyms “secularization”, “worldliness,” “irregiliosity,” and “temporality.” It comes from the Latin word “saecularis,” which means pertaining to a given century or generation. The usage of the term had gradually evolved into a definition of “freeing oneself/something from the influence of a church or religion” [4, 125].

The history of the secularization of Europe can be divided into two major periods. Enlightenment has initially laid the foundations for worldliness that is characterized by anthropocentric cosmology, the human mind being the universal standard for knowledge, as well as the cause-and-effect principle, belief in science inevitable technological progress, and self-sufficiency of a human being. Albert Camus referred to Feuerbach when displaying this new paradigm, calling it “a strange prophecy” where individualism was adopted in place of faith, reason in place of the Bible, politics in place of religion and church, the world in place of heaven, labor replaced prayer, poverty turned into the hell on earth, and man replaced Christ [1].

Modernity is primarily the 20th century era when basically all the listed peculiarities of this worldview have been lauded to the skies and then rejected. Secular thinking of the 20th century is marked by a demand in cosmogony, a burden of personal responsibility for the deterioration of the *whole* world, disappointment, lack of trust towards authorities, relativism, a need in deep relationships, and a strife to return to some basic values. It establishes the limits for reason, a need in faith and experience, the obsolescence of total determinism and then acknowledges the existence of a Higher Being. Evidently, “the crisis of technical, economic and mechanic progress results in the degradation of culture, the outcome of which is a crisis of Renaissance and modern humanism. Generally speaking, any cultural and historical epoch goes through a period of crises. Thus, the modern epoch is associated with a great metaphysical crisis since new sciences have undermined faith in philosophy. The crisis in physics led to the crisis of rationalism, connected to a worldview change and the loss of its objectivity.” [2, 470].

Worldly thinking is a complex phenomenon caused by the civilization’s expedient achievement of a high technological level. Man is torn from nature and soil by globalization

and urbanization, and by massive industrial development. Contrary to the annual farming cycle, the monotone and stable industry turns a worker into a machine, making him impersonal, yet propagating the ideas of human exclusivity and power.

The interpenetration of cultures and transparency of democratic regimes introduces the intelligentsia to a number of approaches to solving identical problems. This creates a strong emphasis on multidimensionalism and ambiguity of cultures, doubts that the world can be cognitively studied, belief in the uniqueness of personal life choices and the right to act upon the judgments of one's conscience. Therefore, secularization is an inevitable path of the development of any civilized society. Once a country or culture gives free access to education, it simultaneously opens the door to doubt, confidence in human power and a certain freedom from religious influence.

One should not, however, equate secularization with atheism or, for example, Marxism. At a first glance, secularization is a neutral process in relation to religious faith; it does not eliminate a religious beginning, but "sanctifies" nonreligious values and goals. Worldliness "frees" man from the influence of God but at the same time creates the emptiness and the need to know the meaning of life and relate to people. Thus, "a secular man is not an atheist, but the one who does not consider urgent to practice one's religion on a daily basis." [3:46]

Enlightenment replaced the medieval "God-king-man" world model of the Universe by the "man-environment" one. All terms defining the "refined" supernatural world are extrapolated into the *worldly* phenomena. Therefore the term "spirituality" that used to refer to the realm of one's relationship with God is now defining man's giftedness or creativity.

One of the foundational elements here is understanding religiosity as true humaneness, the high humanism. This time is characterized by anthropism and anthropomorphism. "Man is the measure of all things" is the principle that now applies to the religious realm. Individualism leads to an austere subjectivity of religious thinking and heathenism. "God still lives in my heart," is a popular theology of today and one has no need in practicing one's religious life. In the realm of theology one can identify the rebirth of paganism and modernization of the fundamental Christian teaching. The dominance of secularism in churches explains the development of liberalistic and eclectic thinking.

Therefore, the religious faith, the worship-faith, is *secretly rejected* by secularism. From our perspective, this is caused by several factors. First, secularism is a "convenient" alternative to a number of aspects of religious faith, as we see from the genesis of secularism. This convenience, however, does not stem from psychological needs of an individual, but is treated by the society as a contemporary analogue of hedonism. Secondly, while religious thinking proclaims that "God is the measure of all things" (Theo-centrism), and while the Renaissance has the motto "Man is the measure of all things (anthropocentrism), secularism proposes, "Man himself is a measure of things for himself," thus locking an individual in his "private Universe."

As seen from experience, rejecting God as personal Savior in effect brings a society into the era of paganism and mysticism. This brings to mind an interesting idea expressed by P. Tillich that the One God of the Bible proclaims Himself as the God of *time*, whose influence is impossible to ignore. He is the only cause of man's existence and an individual needs to make the relationships right with Him. Pagan gods, quite on the contrary, are the gods of *place*, so their power is limited, therefore the "shallowness" of the Universe turns a man into a puppet in the hands of unpredictable powers. So the first result of "paganization" of life is a tyranny of fatalistic predetermination.

On the other hand, disappointment in God and man, as well as austere individualism separates one from both past and future, locking one into the present ("here and now") and attaching one to materialism. Relativism, authority neglect and the state of despair in this case may lead to yet another way of looking at life. If the Absolute is absent, I will "squeeze"

the maximum out of the “relative” no matter what it will cost me, and then I will elevate myself over my own destiny. Akin to this is the warrior’s way in the magical teaching by Carlos Castaneda. Moreover, the ideology of such multidimensional and the widespread “quazireligious” (P. Tillich) movement as “New Age” is permeated with the same worldview tendency.

Therefore, this popular worldview, combining the need for miracle with something invisible, immaterial on the one hand with rejection of religion (primarily Christianity) on the other hand, results in mysticism that excites one’s imagination, yet postulates no moral standards. Then, *superstition*, as a system of beliefs in a *would-be* cause-and-effect relationship, serves as a *bridge* to mysticism or its initiation path. This belief does not just point to the ignorance of its adherents, but a type of libertarian who is not keen on learning about the source of supernatural power, but needs just the desired result (cf. the motto of Aleister Crowley, “Do whatever you want.”)

Relativism can also influence ethics. A secular man does not abide in the world of good and evil, but in the world of gradation/merging of contrasts. The “shallowness” of the world causes the “shallowness” of man which, in turn, makes one’s morality shallow as well. Worshipping any temporal achievement makes a man desensitized to evil and its reflection in himself, other people and life. Such an attitude regarding the problem of evil rooted in superstition and mysticism will eventually bring one to a conscious worship of Satan.

Let us draw some conclusions: Secularism, as a worldview, is connected among other things with high technological achievements, and sees the world as governed by pluralistic thinking that is spread on to a religious sphere as well. The religious innovations of modernity are viewing religion as practical humanism, subjective and anthropomorphic piety and heathenism.

The “Informational Boom” elevates reason and rejects religious faith. However, it is on this stage that reason finds its limitations. Despite being puzzled at the complexity of the new model of the Universe, the unreligious man does not want to return to worship-faith, rather, his self-disillusion leads him into pagan mysticism.

We would like to emphasize that secularism is a legitimate stage in the development of civilization and, figuratively speaking, it can be viewed as a condition where “positive factors call for negative consequences.” Yet we cannot escape the social tendencies by creating “shortcuts” (such as banning education); the experience of medieval scholasticism proves this. But we are called to examine the level of worldliness in our own lives and make a choice between worship-faith and superstition and not set ourselves captive in the prison of worshipping our own needs, whether noble or blasphemous.

Works Cited:

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